

CONCERNING POULTRY

By : Otto Boswinkel

A new beginning

Sometime ago I was asked if I would contribute to this new magazine, 'Avicultura-Europe'.

Poultry is my favourite subject and I find writing about poultry always a pleasant occupation, so I agreed! But now the time has come? I find myself brooding about what exactly to write.

This being a completely new idea, a 'digital' magazine, I decided to make my poultry articles in the form of interactive communication with the readers. Between us we will have a wealth of information on the poultry hobby, their habits, health, genetics, methods of breeding and exhibiting, we may be able to adjust time-honoured methods and develop new and exciting approaches to poultry keeping. I hope that our readers will let me know what specific information is wanted, which subject needs more explanation or whenever they have a special problem concerning their poultry; a problem shared is a problem halved!

This is a new way of communicating for many people and it will take time before things go like clockwork, but there are plenty of items to cover, so let me give you a hint on where we shall start.

Photo: Gea Markvoort

Technical Problems

Incubation, when hatching is poor, where does the 'fault' lay? Often the 'incubator' is blamed; everything was done correctly, the eggs correctly stored (no longer than 14 days) and turned, the temperature and humidity was adjusted, everything worked well but a disappointing hatch!? Other problems noted, infertility, 'dead-in-shell' or the chick dies on hatching, I have heard so many responses, the incubator was at fault, the humidity, or inability to check if that is correct or not, is that really so crucial?



Just take a closer look at a 'brooding' hen, the surrounding temperature will probably be no more than 33°C to 35°C, the ground temperature even less, during the 21 days incubation the humidity will fluctuate, sometimes greatly, between 32% and 78% without any conceivable pattern, then why should a much more tightly controlled incubator 'go wrong'?



Australorp male. Photo: Aviculture Europe

investigations will find only a very small percentage will be caused by incubator' failure, another small percentage by congenital problems, for the most part, we are to blame and that is hard to accept! The cock- and hen-birds who produced the eggs, need to be in as near perfect health as possible and 'compatible'. How we 'select' and condition our birds must play a large role in the success of the eggs hatching.

Negligence, or ignorance, will also play a large part, in why they do not!

Disease and General Health

Sooner or later any poultry breeder/keeper will have to deal with a sick animal, and sometimes the keeper themselves is at fault by keeping too many birds in too small a space and not dealing correctly with hygiene. Just to make things worse we exhibitors often take our birds to Exhibitions, the ideal place to catch disease!

OK! You have a 'sick' bird, you start searching for the correct diagnosis, unfortunately the first step many take is not to seek the advice of a vet, or experienced breeder, but to try various 'cures' just 'in-case' or listen to ill-informed advise, or guesswork on the part of other equally inexperienced poultry keepers. Some of the 'Forums' often have sheer guesswork offered as a solution, "there can be no 'harm' in giving this or that medicine", presuming it maybe 'Coccidiosis'? Some of the medicines used to treat this, if used unwisely, can cause lasting, irreparable damage. Ideally, a vet with practical knowledge of poultry is the best option, if not then a really experienced breeder. Unfortunately, this is often done too late and the illness is



out of control, the animal is irreparably damaged, or worse, it has spread to your other stock, so not only your birds suffer, so do you.

Two eggs produced by the same hen, the left egg weights 19 gram, the right egg 102 gram. Obviously there was something wrong during the egg production stages, taking into consideration the deformation of the Shell; it is possible that Infectious Bronchitis in a former stage could be a cause.
Photo: Otto Boswinkel



Even when the disease is under control we cannot sit back and relax. Unlike a commercial unit, where the animal would just be expected to return to productivity, for the fancy breeder the scenario is much different. They want the bird to regain health, productivity and condition for both breeding and showing; this can only be done by controlling the pathogens and a full return to health. A consideration must be, how much damage has been done and is it repairable. This is where there is still much research to be done and the co-operation of all poultry breeders to find the best therapies for our stock and keep them as healthy as possible; suggestions welcome!

Ethics in the Poultry World

Set values and norms guarantee a system that people can feel comfortable with. The Poultry World is no different, what is allowed and what is not allowed, the fine line between 'improving' and 'falsifying'.

Photo: Aviculture Europe



The rules on exhibiting poultry are relatively clear and concise; you have an excellent animal with just a few miss-coloured feathers, to carefully trim these feathers away, so it is un-noticeable, is no great sin. To dye, or bleach, that is clearly 'falsifying' and cheating! Today there is poultry food available with 'additives' that

can possibly 'enhance' the yellow or red legs colour, or colour of the skin, (if wanted); some additives may even enhance the feather colour to a limited extent. Where is the dividing line here between enhancing and falsifying? Manufacturers additives are generally accepted, but a fancier enhancing the additives would generally be accepted as 'falsifying', fooling both yourself and any purchaser of the animals.

The dividing line between what is and what is not permissible, is a fine line and for some people rather too 'flexible'!

Feeding items

In general, many fancy poultry breeders do not seem to know much about poultry feed and that is a pity, as correct feeding can prevent many problems and optimises the health of your animals. Comparing the ingredients used by industrial feed companies, you will see a great difference in the 'mix' and the additives. On enquiry, often answers are evasive. The best feed manufacturer is one who bases the feed on the experiences of poultry keepers and not on the commercial laying and rearing units, which first and foremost have cost and productivity as the guideline for their feeding programme. The small 'hobby' breeder has much different needs, they still need to be kept economically and be productive but hopefully their period of productivity will be much longer than the commercial units, which often numbers months, not years! For this you need at least a basic knowledge of the nutritional needs of poultry kept on the 'small scale'.



These 'Twentse hoenders' are 8 and 9 years old. Due to a 'special' diet they are still in top condition and would not disgrace them-selves at any competition with younger birds. In spite of their age, they are still laying about 80 tasteful eggs each per year.

Photo: Otto Boswinkel



Most good feed manufacturers advise to provide greenstuff as part of the diet. Green foods are a valuable addition as they contain fibre in abundance; when you compliment the basic feed with greenstuff and herbs you will soon see an overall improvement to your poultries health and condition, the droppings will be more firm and the white 'top' (the ureum) will virtually vanish.

In coming issues we will look at which are the best greenstuffs and herbs to give and when and how much may be given to the best advantage.



Photo courtesy of
K. Rustenhoven

Perception of the hobby

The one person just wants a few hens kept in the garden for fresh eggs, another wants to win championships at exhibitions. Somewhere in-between there is a whole range of pleasure to be found in poultry keeping.

Myself, I find most pleasure in solving problems that may arise with health, feeding and all aspects of showing and preparation of the animals, drawing on my own experience and what I have learned from others.

Will this young Faverolles pullet become just as beautiful as her mother, who was Champion at the Martini show 2004? This youngster, although not finished moulting, is already showing correct colour and fine distinct lacing, with the good body outline of a quality bird.

Photo:
Otto Boswinkel



I have selected a few items for discussion in future issues, which with the aid of this digital Magazine, should be a perfect vehicle for interactive question and answer communication to help with the various problems that sometimes arise with this hobby.

[Please send your reactions and questions](#)

Advertentie



Avicultura's 108th edition was a great success, thanks to all breeders and visitors. Our show was a display of a great variety of small livestock. We would appreciate it very much if you would visit our show, or even participate, next year (January 2006) when we will have this brandnew item:

'BRITISH BEST AT AVICULTURA'S DIERENRIJK'

~The Days of all pure English Breeds, feather as well as fur~

13-14-15 January 2006 in the "Groenoordhallen", Willem de Zwijgerlaan 2, 2316 GB LEIDEN – Holland

<http://avicultura.sierduif.nl/>